

STORY

The sweet smell of Christmas



Mr and Mrs Meadows lived in a quiet village with their lively three-year-old son called Jack who had orange curly hair and thick glasses with blue frames.

Since the beginning of December Mr Meadows had been wondering what to buy his wife for Christmas. But meanwhile he and his wife had had an argument. She wanted to replace their bedroom chest of drawers because the old one was falling to bits. He wanted to try to mend it instead.

'George there's no point in trying to fix it, you've tried before, the front legs are still wobbly and the top two drawers still always get stuck.'

'But have you seen how much a new one costs? We really can't afford it.'

'I know,' said his wife, 'but we can try to save on other things, can't we?'

They hated arguing and they were both in a bad mood. But a few days later, Mr Meadows saw a chest of drawers in the window of their local charity shop. He measured it, took Mrs Meadows to see it and they both agreed it was perfect. But they didn't have much money left for presents.

'Never mind,' they said, 'We don't need to get presents for each other, the chest of drawers can be our present, the main thing is that we've got the little toy bus for Jack! But secretly George still wanted to get his wife something, even though it couldn't be much. And secretly she still wanted to get him something...'

'I'm sorry I was so horrible, George,' she said.

'And I'm sorry I was so stubborn,' he replied.

'I was afraid we would have a terrible Christmas arguing or not speaking to each other. And that would have been so awful for Jack too.' His wife smiled and gave him a kiss.

The chest of drawers was delivered and the old one removed just a week before Christmas. Mr Meadows ran his hand over the gleaming wood with great satisfaction and tested the drawers to make sure they were still gliding smoothly. They all seemed fine, but then he found that one of the two small drawers at the top was stuck half way.

'Oh no!,' he exclaimed as he pushed and shoved and peered inside. Then he felt something stuck at the back. Reaching his hand in, he found a bottle of perfume. Chanel Number 5! He didn't know much about perfume but it seemed perfect as a Christmas present for his wife! He rang the charity shop who said anything found in the drawers was OK to keep. He put it in a little box and wrapped it up carefully in lovely red and green paper with 'Happy Christmas' written all over it. Then he hid it in the spare room where no one went. He didn't know that Chanel Number 5 is a really expensive perfume.

Then 23rd December came. 'Sheila!' he called to his wife, once Jack was well tucked up and fast asleep upstairs in bed. 'Where did you put those presents we bought for Jack?'

Cathy Beer shares a Christmas story for the young and those, ever so slightly older.



Illustration: © Duncan Harper

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'Oh, they are hidden all over the place,' replied Mrs Meadows, 'you know what Jack's like, into everything, and I still need to wrap them up. The toy bus is in our bedroom, the bricks are in the garden shed, and the felt tips are on the top of the kitchen cupboard.'

'Ok,' said Mr Meadows, 'I'll find them and wrap them up now.' There was just enough of the red and green Christmas wrapping paper left. He hid them near the present of the perfume in the darkest corner of the fireplace that was never used, behind the grate.

The next day was Christmas Eve. Jack was terribly excited. 'What time will Father Christmas come, mummy?'

'Oh he only comes when he is sure that children are in bed fast asleep, not peeping.'

'Can I go to bed now?' It was the first time Jack had actually asked to go to bed, normally there was a great fuss to get him there.

'No Jack, it's only 11 o'clock in the morning! You will have to wait till bedtime to go to bed.'

'Oh no!' said Jack giving a big sigh and pushing his glasses onto his nose. 'What time is bedtime?'

'Half past six.'

So Jack played all day and every twenty minutes he would ask 'What time is it?' or 'Is it half past six yet?' or 'When is it half past six, mummy?'

Finally Jack had his tea and six thirty came and he raced to bed. After Dad had read him his story he tried to stay awake for Father Christmas but his eyes grew heavy and soon he fell asleep.

Early next morning Mr Meadows brought his wife breakfast in bed. 'Happy Christmas, darling!' 'Oh, Happy Christmas George, how lovely!' And on the tray, next to the cup of tea was a present wrapped in red and green paper. Mr Meadows couldn't wait to see her delight when she opened it and found the Chanel Number 5. But when she opened the box and tipped out the contents it was a little red bus! Before Mrs Meadows could say anything, they heard Jack shrieking and giggling with delight!

They rushed into his room and were almost overpowered by the smell. 'Look, Mummy, look what Father Christmas has put in my stocking! Lovely smelly stuff! And there on Jack's bed, strewn with tangerines, sweets, and a wind-up mouse was the empty bottle of Chanel Number 5.'

Mr Meadows felt his heart sink to his slippers, 'Oh no,' he gulped.

'What on earth's going on, George?' 'Well,' said Mr Meadows, feeling almost sick with the smell of such a quantity of perfume, 'I think Father Christmas must have come down the chimney in the spare room and got muddled.'

'Oh... oh I see!' Mrs Meadows smiled, with a knowing look.

He took her by the arm and led her out of the room. 'I am so very sorry, darling, but now there is no present for you.'

'That doesn't matter at all, dear, but my main worry is how you found the money for such a very expensive present? That Chanel Number 5 must have cost more than the chest of drawers.'

So Mr Meadows told her the whole story, how he had found the perfume at the back of the drawer.

Jack came out and starting dancing around on the landing. His parents had to put their hands to their noses and get out their hankies and dab their eyes because the smell of Chanel Number 5 soaked into Jack's pyjama top was so powerful.

'Jack, dear,' gasped his mother through her hankie, 'why don't you get dressed and go out to play before breakfast?'

To Jack this was a very exciting prospect and he rushed to get ready.

Then Mrs Meadows turned to her husband. 'Now let me give you your present, George.' She bent down and fished out from under their bed a parcel, nicely wrapped in blue tissue paper. When Mr Meadows opened it he couldn't believe his eyes. It was a cap. A lovely warm tweed one.

'Hang on a moment, Sheila; this is just like the one I lost soon after Jack was born!' He tried it on. 'It fits perfectly! In fact I think this one looks even better! How did you manage to buy one so similar? And anyway, didn't we agree that we weren't buying each other presents this year?'

Mrs Meadows smiled. Her smile became a giggle and then she began to laugh so much that she had to hold her sides while tears streamed down her face. 'It's... it's...!' Finally she got her words out 'It's the same cap, George, it's your cap!'

'What do you mean?'

'When I cleared out the old chest of drawers before we got rid of it, right at the back of the top drawer was your cap! That must be why the top two drawers were always getting stuck!'



Illustration: ©Duncan Harper

'Well, I never!' laughed Mr Meadows. 'Well, I must say I'm delighted to have it back - I mean delighted with my present!' And he put it on and gave her a hug. Then Mr Meadows put the toy bus back in its box, wrapped it up and put it with Jack's other presents under the Christmas tree.

'You know what?' he said, 'even if we haven't bought each other presents, this is the best Christmas! After all,' he said, looking at baby Jesus in the crib, 'what is Christmas if not to remember that love is the biggest

gift, and giving doesn't always mean buying?'

At that moment Jack came bounding in from the garden, smelling only a teeny weeny bit of Chanel Number 5, and after he had torn open his presents and beamed at his parents to show how thrilled he was and put the wrapping paper on his head, they all laughed and sat round the table to have breakfast together.

Christmas had begun. 